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Nearly 5 tons of trash collected in L.A. skid row sweep

July 9, 2012 | 5:48 pm

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Hundreds of hypodermic needles. Gallons of human waste. Dead rats.

These were among the items cleared from the streets and sidewalks of Los Angeles' skid row neighborhood during a 13-day sweep that wrapped up Friday, according to city officials.

The cleanup was launched in response to a Los Angeles County report citing numerous public health dangers in the area.

In all, nearly five tons of trash and more than 81 cubic yards of waste water were collected from six miles of roadway and sidewalks between 5th and 7th streets and Gladys Avenue and Wall Street, said Michelle Vargas, a spokeswoman for the city Department of Public Works. They included soiled mattresses, sofas, wheelchairs and portable commodes.

City workers also removed 278 hypodermic needles, 94 syringes, 60 razor blades, 10 knives, 11 items of drug paraphernalia and a stash of marijuana, Vargas said. Most of the needles were recovered from San Julian Street, between 6th and 7th streets, an area where police say drug dealers and their clients congregate.

Two 5-gallon buckets of feces and three similarly sized buckets of urine were found in a nearby block of 6th Street, where a more entrenched homeless encampment had formed, Vargas said.

City officials had said cleaning crews were hampered by a federal court injunction issued last year that placed limits on the removal of items left unattended on skid row sidewalks. Residents had complained that their property was seized and destroyed while they used a restroom, filled water jugs or appeared in court.

A subsequent buildup of trash, needles and human waste created a health hazard that city officials said they were required to address. Some neighborhood activists accused the city of deliberately

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allowing conditions to deteriorate to bolster its case against the injunction, charges denied by the city.

A multiagency task force was assembled to develop policies and procedures that strike a balance between respecting the property rights of the homeless and ensuring that people can live and work safely in the area, said Patrick Butler, an assistant chief with the Los Angeles Fire Department who served as operations manager for the effort.

Notices were posted on walls, and teams assembled by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority canvassed the area to ask people to remove their belongings during the cleaning. In the process, at least 14 people were provided shelter and other types of help, said the authority's executive director, Michael Arnold.

The city also paid for an additional 500 storage bins at the Check-In Center, a warehouse run by the Central City East Assn. business improvement district. The facility, which had been operating at capacity for years, can now accommodate the belongings of 1,134 people free of charge.

Items recovered during the sweep that were not deemed a biohazard were bagged, tagged and sent to a city storage facility, where people have 90 days to retrieve their belongings. A total of 30 bags was collected, including medicine bottles, checkbooks, identification documents, clothing and at least one watch, Vargas said. Three shopping carts and a walker were also sent to the facility, she said. So far, just one bag has been claimed.

Many residents welcomed the cleanup, although neighborhood activists expressed concern that it might be followed by stricter enforcement of a city regulation that bars items from being stored on the pavement. Pete White, co-director of the Los Angeles Community Action Network, a longtime critic of the city's efforts to clean up skid row, said resources would be better spent addressing the "root causes" of homelessness.

Members of the city task force plan to meet this week to review the effort and develop a maintenance plan. Although the area is noticeably cleaner, discarded food containers and streaks of urine have already reappeared on some of the more crowded streets.

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— Alexandra Zavis

Photo: Los Angeles City officials launched a major street-cleaning program in the skid row area of downtown June 19, 2012. Credit: Mark Boster / Los Angeles Times

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Scott Poston · Top Commenter · Centr Maya de Idiomas

whomever lost their marijuana stash is bummed.

Reply · 2 Likes · July 9 at 7:00pm



Helen Rankin Silvers · Top Commenter · Works at Semi-Retired

Scott...whom is a pronoun in the objective case so the correct pronoun would be who (subjective case).

Reply · 1 Like · July 9 at 9:16pm



Guy Impound · Top Commenter · Birmingham High School, Van Nuys, California

They should take all of it and dump it on Tony V's front porch...this was with his blessing if you remember. Now it's OL the rat hole with the rest of his brilliant ideas.

Reply · 1 Like · July 10 at 6:38pm



Stephen Hauskins · Top Commenter · UC Davis

Too bad. It seems it would cost a lot less if these people could be helped.

Reply · 1 Like · July 9 at 8:01pm



Maravi Edgar

State of CA is broke as hell. Moonbeam is looking to taxes as all to death where the sales tax is near 10% maybe to another state where a shelter is ran on pennys on the dollar. Everything or business anywhere

Reply · Like · July 9 at 8:31pm



Joseph L Cooke · Top Commenter · Works at Tac56 Consulting

Why no Soylent Green trucks?

Reply · 1 Like · July 9 at 7:14pm



Cesar Mariano · Top Commenter

That's one of many Hollywood aspects LA made famous for her receptive accommodation regardless of social classes scenes where skid row often depicted

Reply · Like · July 9 at 8:14pm



Carolin Shining · Owner at Law Offices of Carolin K. Shining of

Sad that only 2 photos were deemed sufficient to depict this story.

Reply · Like · July 9 at 7:53pm



Guy Impound · Top Commenter · Birmingham High School, Van Nuys, California

They wouldn't allow close up of the turds on the ground....

Reply · Like · July 10 at 6:39pm



Gunther Bauer · Works at Associate Broker/Realtor

I had no clue yyour ex had a part in this <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Jjpdqbbmi974273486575/445>

Reply · Like · July 11 at 10:19am



Efrain Rojas · Top Commenter · Altadena, California

Send them to the People's Republic of Santa Monica.

Reply · Like · July 9 at 7:45pm

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Lavan v. City of Los Angeles, No. 11-56253 archived on September 11, 2012